



RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT
AFL - CIO

To: House Finance Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative
Date: April 28, 2026
Re: Student Mental and Behavioral Health Categorical Aid
Testimony in **Support of H 7455** (Furtado, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of H 7455, legislation that addresses growing student mental and behavioral health needs by providing dedicated funding to hire and retain critical school-based support staff.

Students across Rhode Island are experiencing increased mental health and behavioral challenges that directly impact their ability to learn and succeed in the classroom. Educators and school staff are managing more complex student needs than ever before, often without sufficient staffing or resources to provide appropriate support. This places strain on classrooms, disrupts learning, and limits schools' ability to respond effectively.

H 7455 establishes a dedicated funding stream equal to two percent of district expenditures to support mental and behavioral health services. The bill ensures that these funds are used specifically to hire and retain qualified staff, including school social workers, counselors, psychologists, paraprofessionals, and behavioral specialists. It also ties funding eligibility to nationally recommended staffing ratios, helping ensure resources are directed where needs are greatest.

From the perspective of educators and school staff, access to trained mental and behavioral health professionals is essential to maintaining safe and supportive learning environments. When schools are properly staffed, students receive timely interventions, teachers are better supported, and classrooms are more stable and productive.

This proposal represents a meaningful step toward addressing longstanding gaps in student support services while strengthening the educator workforce and improving learning conditions across Rhode Island.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support H 7455.

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